Significant Books in Review


Can facts change attitudes and behavior? Certainly we Americans have a profound faith in the fruits of knowledge, though perhaps not profound enough if judged by inadequate school financial support and the blasts of school critics. Yet, in spite of these, there is a tendency for many individuals, when in an uncomfortable dilemma, to seek the facts.

For those who feel that facts can help, With All Deliberate Speed is certainly the place to find facts on the desegregation question as it pertains to the formerly (and currently) segregated states of the South. Written by journalists—and thus concise and occasionally colorful—a series of chapters covers most of the relevant aspects of the desegregation picture. The picture is presented, and since these are journalists, not editorial writers, conclusions or appeals to emotions are rather carefully omitted. An ardent proseggregationist may feel the same discomfort as an ardent antisegregationist in not finding his point of view vindicated unconditionally by the facts.

For a reader who has kept up with the issues of the Southern School News there are few new facts in this volume. It provides a very handy reference and compilation, however, of the events that have been in the news since the 1954 Supreme Court Decision. In addition there are valuable sections giving legal and historical backgrounds.

Like any volume dealing with a current issue, new events make some portions out of date almost before the book can be printed. One misses a report in depth of how the Negro community in the South is feeling and reacting. The school administrator will find of exceptional interest the few pages in Chapter 11, “Man in No Man’s Land,” which describe what the school man faces. The politician is well quoted, but only occasionally is reference made to the role of the church and church leaders. As a competent—and almost painfully objective—summary of background and events up to the date of publication, this book can be confidently recommended to persons of all shades of opinions. Perhaps the facts may change some of them!

Reviewed by Jean D. Grambs, supervisor of adult education, Prince George’s County, Maryland, and lecturer in education, University of Maryland.


A phone call in the middle of the night is always frightening. My friend’s voice conveyed anguish.

“The young couple next door—her baby is due tonight. We didn’t know, but
this is their second baby. The first is mongoloid. We took her to the hospital because the husband is frantic with fear. Do you know anyone who can help?"

That was two years ago. Willard Abraham’s little daughter Barbara had already lived her few short months but her parents had not yet come to share their experience with others. Now, in this slender volume written by Mr. Abraham, it is all recorded, from the shock of finding their pretty, newborn daughter to be mongoloid, through the dreadful anguish of the first day, into the periods of acceptance, consultation, decision and adjustment.

Barbara, fortunately for thousands of parents of retarded children who may read her brief story, was born to a family wonderfully equipped to receive her. Willard Abraham is professor of education at Arizona State College. He and Mrs. Abraham already had a normal, husky, two-year-old son. This, the reader feels, must have been a powerful factor in giving them courage to accept themselves as the parents of a deviate child. For a year before Barbara’s birth her father had been participating in studies of mentally retarded children, had taken his classes to visit Arizona’s institutions for their care. He knew medical men in that field, knew where to turn for consultation and advice. He knew other families which had traveled this road before him.

Mr. and Mrs. Abraham were fortunate, not only in their own resources, but in the informed community in which they faced their problem. On every page one is aware that to a family with a mentally retarded child the intellectual climate of the neighborhood is of tremendous importance. Here is truly a case where "what the neighbors think" must have a bearing on major family decisions. To take Barbara home, or place her in an institution? Only once does the author allow the reader to glimpse his panic when a remnant of age-old ignorance, curiosity and fears creeps in. The contrast between that glimpse and the enlightened atmosphere of the rest of the narrative is sickening.

Mr. Abraham has written in simple terms that will be understandable to all "the young couples next door" whose children are mentally retarded. His book offers them understanding sympathy, practical advice and courage to look forward to their future children. It should be widely used by laymen working in the volunteer agencies which are trying to increase public education about these children who are described by Mr. Abraham as "unfinished." To these people, to educators who are trying to help such children develop to their full capacities, and even, we suspect, to medical researchers seeking the causes of mongolism and other forms of mental retardation, Barbara may prove not only a prologue but an inspiration.

—Reviewed by Gene Pfahl Bielefeldt, Rockville, Maryland.


Tributes to the bounty and wisdom of the Communist Party, and testimony of universal, almost frantic support of Moscow’s policies and policy-makers, abound in Soviet periodicals. The American reader, accustomed to such ardor only in commercial advertising, inevitably wonders what actually goes on in the minds of these enthusiastic comrades.

In Soviet Education, eight former Soviet teachers provide at least a partial answer. Though their primary concern
is to describe their experiences in education, the principal value of their accounts is perhaps more human than historical. The student who participates in a mass demonstration against the church or votes praise to the "genius Stalin," the instructor lecturing with respect and courtesy to an NKVD agent who has recently knocked his teeth out in an interrogation, or even the Kirghiz hero who at the age of 12 has betrayed his father for the good of the state, appears in Soviet Education as a hapless but breathing participant in a tragedy. It is a story of degradation so painful to read that, as Dostoyevsky indicated in another regard, one can only shudder at the thought of what the experience must have been.

The accounts deal mainly with the 1920's and 1930's. They emphasize the gross, if not absurd, failures of Soviet education, and sweeping generalizations, on subjects ranging from the anti-Soviet attitude of the teachers to the chastity of Russian women, are frequent. However, if expectations of ideological obedience must persist in a totalitarian state, the book furnishes a valuable human backdrop for information coming out of the Soviet Union. In addition, Soviet sources substantiate the persistence even today of educational difficulties mentioned in Soviet Education, such as the continued use of pre-Revolutionary mathematics textbooks, poor equipment—or lack of equipment—in the schools, and overworking of students.

The human interest value of the accounts of course presupposes the veracity of the writing. In this regard it is interesting to note that a recent Soviet book review, which may euphemistically be called "violent," refers to Soviet refugees as "the scum of society" and to Dr. Counts, whose The Challenge of Soviet Education was allegedly based on their testimony, as a "frightened bourgeois" who operates "in defiance of scholarship and common sense." But Dr. Counts, in his Foreword to Soviet Education, attributes the value of Dr. Kline's selections precisely to their authors, who are not "official Communist spokesmen or visitors and students from other countries," but "former Soviet citizens who had spent years both as students and as teachers in Soviet educational institutions."

Reviewed by Richard Renfield, project secretary, Educational Policies Commission, National Education Association, Washington 6, D. C.


The feature article in a recent issue of Life magazine compared the education of a "typical" Russian student and a "typical" American student. This article, and many others appearing in recent months, is reflective of the tremendous amount of interest in and, in some cases, fear of the Soviet system of education. Publication of Education in the USSR, together with the other new books on Russian education, should help thoughtful people obtain some of the basic facts upon which rational judgments may be made. Certain of the popular accounts have a tendency to overlook or underemphasize some of the aspects of Rus-
sian education which do not support a particular thesis the writer wishes to develop.

While the facts presented in this report by the U. S. Office of Education do show that the Soviet student gets more mathematics and science instruction than the American student, that he is also far more serious about his studies, and that, for the purpose it serves, Soviet education is effective, yet a careful reader will also note that the Russians have their educational problems, too. Schools in outlying regions are inferior to those in cities; ten per cent of the students fail and have to repeat the work; outbursts of hooliganism and other forms of juvenile delinquency do occur; and complaints are heard that too many engineers are being trained but not enough technicians.

Some of the facts cited in the volume will have important implications for people, both lay and professional, who want to improve our own educational system; for example, the teacher-pupil ratio in the USSR is 17 to 1; salaries and prestige of teachers are very high; and a greater percentage of the national income than in the United States goes for educational purposes. Perhaps the most significant of the statements in the report is the following value judgment: "Soviet students lack the encouragement given to American students to freely develop critical faculties, learn to differentiate among opposing points of view, and make up their own minds on controversial questions."

For a source of information on the organization, curriculum, financing and administration of the Soviet educational system this report is very valuable. But it is largely a statistical report and does need to be supplemented with other materials of a more interpretative and philosophical nature.

—Reviewed by Robert G. Risinger, associate professor of education, University of Maryland, College Park.

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science and social science have proved to us. We must use well the intelligence with which we have been endowed. We must not anger and strike out blindly when a mirror is held up for us to take a good look at ourselves as individuals or as a nation. We must cease to get strength from name-calling and stereotype stories which hurt the feelings of others. We must cease from using such tricks and subtleties as "gentlemen's agreements" and gerrymandering. For only after we have rid ourselves of these negative aspects can we expect to be a true example for the other nations of the world who are searching for the ideology that will give rights, responsibility and dignity to each individual and each nation.